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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTO DOMINGO 000751

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CAR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [DR](#)

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR DOMINICAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION,  
MAY 16

REF: A. SANTO DOMINGO 0418 (GOVT'S RULES VIOLATIONS)  
[1](#)B. SANTO DOMINGO 0699 (OAS REPORT)  
[1](#)C. SANTO DOMINGO 0668 (PRD CLAIMS POSSIBLE FRAUD)  
[1](#)D. SANTO DOMINGO 0180 (DIVERGING POLLS)  
[1](#)E. SANTO DOMINGO 0039 (RHETORIC HEATS UP)  
[1](#)F. 07 SANTO DOMINGO 2366 (SUMMARY OF CAMPAIGN)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Dominicans go to the polls on Friday May 16 in the fourth presidential election since 1994, when widespread fraud led to significant reforms to the electoral system. Since 1994, substantial USAID funds have been used to strengthen the Central Elections Board (JCE), make it more independent, and support civil society monitoring of the Board. The results have been positive: There is a consensus here that the current JCE is qualified and independent and, while not without any faults, may be the strongest Board to-date. Polling shows that 72 percent of Dominicans rate their confidence in the Board as "high" or "average." This JCE has faced the challenge of addressing the issue of the use of government spending to favor incumbent candidate Leonel Fernandez (Refs A-B).

U.S. Interests

[1](#)2. (SBU) U.S. interests regarding the election have focused on the strength of the democratic system, management of elections, and quality of the related government institutions, as well as the civil society organizations that monitor them (see Reftels). The U.S. and foreign policy in general have played little-to-no role in the campaign. The PLD and PRD both value highly their relationship with the U.S., support CAFTA, and are cautious about criticizing Hugo Chavez for fear of jeopardizing the significant aid the country receives via Venezuela's Petrocaribe program.

The Polls

[1](#)3. (SBU) The latest poll, by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner/Diario Libre, shows Fernandez, of the Dominican Liberation Party (PLD), leading Miguel Vargas Maldonado, of the Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD), by 55 to 37 percent. The results of this poll, which are similar to the findings of other surveys going back to the beginning of the year, suggest that Fernandez has a good chance to obtain the 50 percent that he needs to avoid a second-round runoff election. There are five other candidates. Amable Aristy Castro of the once dominant PRSC party is polling at 6 percent, while the other four candidates -- Eduardo Estrella, Trajano Santana, Pedro de Jesus Candelier, and Guillermo Moreno -- each receive about one percent in surveys.

## Election Observation

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¶4. (SBU) The respected local NGO Participacion Ciudadana is carrying out a domestic election observation effort. This operation, to which the USG has contributed US\$400,000, will field 4,000 observers. Participacion Ciudadana has comprehensively covered the pre-election period in its reports, including citing in detail the ways in which government spending is used to favor incumbent presidential candidate Leonel Fernandez.

¶5. (SBU) International observation is being led by the Organization of American States. The OAS mission is led by Argentinean diplomat Jose Octavio Bordon, and has been funded with \$180,000 of USG resources. On May 6, the OAS issued a "Pre-Electoral Report" which praised the performance of the JCE; criticized the ruling PLD party for spending state resources on the campaign; and, effectively put the opposition PRD party on notice that technical problems regarding the new electronic vote count were not significant enough to affect the outcome of the election (Ref B).

¶6. (U) Fourteen EMBOFFs will be serving as volunteer observers under the OAS flag. Both Participacion Ciudadana and the OAS are conducting quick counts on election day. In addition, the polling firm Penn and Schoen will be carrying out an exit poll.

## Timetable and Statistics

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¶7. (U) The last day that campaigning is permitted is May 14

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and, traditionally, the political parties here respect the one-day cooling off period. This had been considered one of the least violent campaigns in recent memory; however, election-related incidents in Barahona and Montecristi on May 9 and 15 resulted in the deaths of four people. The sale of alcohol is banned on May 15 and 16. Public schools, which host most of the voting stations, are closed May 14-16 to facilitate the organization of voting day activities.

¶8. (U) The polls will be open from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. In past elections, the JCE has issued its "First Bulletin" of results late in the evening or in the early hours of the following day. However, this year the Board hopes to publicize the preliminary vote count at 8:00 or 9:00 p.m. Early bulletins do not always contain a significant sample, so there is a possibility that the winner (or the fact that a runoff will be held) will not be known until midday on May 17.

¶9. (U) There are 5.76 million registered voters and 4,005 voting stations. Some 155,000 of the voters are registered abroad, a significant increase since overseas voting was first permitted in 2004.

(U) Please visit us at  
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